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By Mr. T O W N,

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— — — *Altiùs omnem*

Expedit primâ repetens ab origine famam. VIRG.

To Mr. T O W N.

S I R,

Oxford, May 12th, 1754.



OUR last week's paper on the subject of Bets put me in mind of an extract I lately met with in some news papers, from the "Life of Pope Sixtus the Fifth, written by "Mr. Farnworth." The passage is as follows.

' It was reported in *Rome*, that *Drake* had taken and
' plundered *St. Domingo* in *Hispaniola*, and carried off an
' immense booty. This account came in a private letter to
' *Paul Secchi*, a very considerable merchant in the city, who
' had large concerns in those parts, which he had insured.
' Upon receiving this news, he sent for the insurer *Samson*
I i ' *Ceneda*,

‘ *Ceneda*, a Jew, and acquainted him with it. The Jew,
 ‘ whose interest it was to have such a report thought false,
 ‘ gave many reasons why it could not possibly be true; and
 ‘ at last worked himself up into such a passion, that he said
 ‘ I’ll lay you a pound of my flesh it is a lye. *Secchi*, who
 ‘ was of a fiery hot temper, replied, I’ll lay you a thousand
 ‘ crowns against a pound of your flesh, that it is true. The
 ‘ Jew accepted the wager, and articles were immediately ex-
 ‘ ecuted betwixt them, That if *Secchi* won, he should him-
 ‘ self cut the flesh with a sharp knife from whatever part of
 ‘ the Jew’s body he pleased. The truth of the account
 ‘ was soon confirmed; and the Jew was almost distracted
 ‘ when he was informed that *Secchi* had solemnly sworn he
 ‘ would compel him to the exact literal performance of his
 ‘ contract. A report of this transaction was brought to the
 ‘ Pope, who sent for the parties, and being informed of the
 ‘ whole affair, said, “ When contracts are made, it is just
 ‘ they should be fulfilled, as this shall. Take a knife
 ‘ therefore, *Secchi*, and cut a pound of flesh from any part
 ‘ you please of the Jew’s body. We advise you however
 ‘ to be very careful; for if you cut but a scruple more or
 ‘ less than your due, you shall certainly be hanged.”

WHAT induced me to trouble you with this is a remark
 made by the editor, “ that the scene between *Shylock* and
 “ *Antonio* in the *Merchant of Venice* is borrowed from this
 “ story.” I should perhaps have acquiesced in this notion,
 if I had not seen a note in the “ *Observations on Spenser’s*
Faerie Queene” just published by Mr. *T. Warton* of *Trinity*
College, where He has plainly discovered the real source from
 which *Shakespeare* drew his fable, which He informs us is
 founded upon an ancient ballad. The admirers of *Shakespeare*
 are obliged to him for this curious discovery; but as Mr.
Warton has only given some extracts, they would undoubtedly
 be glad to see the whole. This Ballad is most probably no
 where to be met with, but in the *Ashmolean Museum* in this
 University, where it is preserved by that famous Antiquary
Anthony à Wood: I have therefore sent you a faithful tran-
 script

script of it; and you will agree with me that it will do you more credit, as a CONNOISSEUR, to draw this hidden treasure into light, than if you had discovered an *Otho* or a *Niger*.

A S O N G.

Shewing the crueltie of GERNUTUS a JEWE, who lending to a marchant an hundred crownes, would have a pound of his flesh, because he could not pay him at the time appointed.

IN Venice town not long agoe
A cruel Jew did dwell,
Which lived all on usurie,
As Italian writers tell.

Gernutus called was the Jew,
Which never thought to die,
Nor never yet did any good
To them in streets that lye.

His life was like a barrow hogge,
That liveth many a day,
Yet never once doth any good,
Untill men will him slay.

Or like a filthy heap of dung,
That lyeth in a hoord;
Which never can doe any good,
Till it be spread abroad.

So fares it with this Usurer,
He cannot sleep in rest,
For fear the theefe doth him pursue,
To pluck him from his nest.

His heart doth thinke on many a wile,
How to deceive the poore;
His mouth is almost full of mucke,
Yet still he gapes for more.

His wife must lend a shilling,
For every weeke a penny,
Yet bring a pledge that's double worth,
If that you will have any.

And see (likewise) you keepe your day,
Or else you loose it all:
This was the living of his wife,
Her cow she doth it call.

Within that citie dwelt that time
A merchant of great fame,
Which being distressed in his need,
Unto *Gernutus* came:

Desiring him to stand his friend,
For twelve moneth and a day,
To lend to him an hundred crownes,
And he for it would pay

Whatsoever he would demand of him,
And pledges he should have:
No (qd. the Jew with steering lookes)
Sir aske what you will have.

No penny for the loane of it
For one yeere you shall pay;
You may do me as good a turne,
Before my dying day.

But we will have a merry jeaft
For to be talked long:
You shall make me a bond (quoth he)
That shall be large and strong.

And this shall be the forfeiture,
Of your owne flesh a pound:
If you agree, make you the bond,
And here's a hundred crownes.

The second part of the Jewes crueltie;
setting forth the mercifullnesse of the
Judge towards the Merchant.

With right good will the merchant said,
And to the bond was made,
When twelve months and a day drew on
That back it should be payd.

The merchant's ships were all at sea,
And money came not in;
Which way to take, or what to doe
To thinke he doth begin.

And to *Gernutus* straight he comes
With cap and bended knee,
And sayd to him of curtesie
I praye you beare with mee.

My day is come, and I have not
The money for to pay:
And little good the forfeiture
Will doe you I dare say.

With all my heart *Gernutus* said,
Command it to your minde;
In things of bigger weight than this
You shall me readie finde.

He goes his way; the day once past
Gernutus doth not slacke,
 To get a Serjeant presentlie,
 And clapt him on the backe.

And layd him into prison strong,
 And fued his bond withall;
 And when the judgment day was come,
 For judgment he doth call.

The merchant's friends came thither fast,
 With many a weeping eye,
 For other means they could not finde,
 But he that day must dye.

Some offered for his hundred crownes
 Five hundred for to pay;
 And some a thousand, two or three,
 Yet still he did deny.

And at the last ten thousand crownes
 They offered him to save,
Gernutus said, I will no gold
 My forfeit I will have,

A pound of flesh is my demand,
 And that shall be my hyre.
 Then said the judge yet good my friend
 Let me of you desire,

To take the flesh from such a place
 As yet you let him live;
 Doe so, and lo an 100 crownes,
 To thee here will I give.

No, no, quoth he, no judgment here
 For this it shall be tryde,
 For I will have my pound of fleshe
 From under his right side.

It grieved all the companie
 His crueltie to see,
 For neither friend, nor foe could helpe,
 But he must spoyle bee.

The bloudie Jew now ready is
 With whetted blade in hand,
 To spoyle the bloud of innocent,
 By forfeit of his bond.

And as he was about to strike
 In him the deadly blow:
 Stay (quoth the Judge) thy crueltie,
 I charge thee to doe so.

Sith needs thou wilt thy forfeit have,
 Which is of flesh a pound:
 See that thou shed no drop of blood,
 Nor yet the man confound.

For if thou doe, like murderer,
 Thou here shalt hanged bee:
 Likewise of flesh see that thou cut
 No more then longs to thee.

For if thou take either more or lesse,
 To the value of a mite,
 Thou shalt be hanged presently,
 As is both law and right.

Gernutus now waxt frantic mad,
 And wotes not what to say:
 Quoth he at last, ten thousand crownes
 I will that he shall pay.

And so I grant to set him free:
 The Judge doth answer make,
 You shall not have a penny given,
 Your forfeiture now take.

At the last he doth demand,
 But for to have his owne:
 No, quoth the Judge, doe as you list,
 Thy Judgement shall be showne,

Either take your pound of flesh, (qd he)
 Or cancell me your bond:
 O cruell Judge then quoth the Jew,
 That doth against me stand.

And so with griped grieved minde
 He biddeth them farewell:
 All the people prays'd the lord
 That ever this heard tell.

Good people that do hear this song,
 For truth I dare well say,
 That many a wretch as ill as he
 Doth live now at this day,

That seeketh nothing but the spoyle
 Of many a wealthie man,
 And for to trap the innocent,
 Devise what they can,

From whom the Lord deliver me,
 And every Christian too,
 And send to them like sentence eke,
 That meaneth so to doo.

Printed at London by E. P. for J. Wright dwelling in Gilt-spur-street.

IT will be proper to subjoin what the ingenious
 Mr. *Warton* has observed upon this subject.—‘ It may
 ‘ be objected, says he, that this ballad might have been
 ‘ written

‘written after, and copied from, *Shakespeare’s* play. But if
 ‘that had been the case, it is most likely, that the author
 ‘would have preserved *Shakespeare’s* name of *Shylock* for the
 ‘Jew; and nothing is more likely, than that *Shakespeare* in
 ‘copying from this ballad, should alter the name from *Gernu-*
 ‘*tus* to one more Jewish. Another argument is, that our
 ‘ballad has the air of a narrative written before *Shakespeare’s*
 ‘play; I mean, that, if it had been written after the play,
 ‘it would have been much more full and circumstantial: At
 ‘present, it has too much the nakedness of an original.’

It would indeed be absurd to think that this ballad was
 taken from *Shakespeare’s* play, as they differ in the most essen-
 tial circumstances. The sum borrowed is in the former three
 thousand ducats, in the latter an hundred crowns: the time
 limited for payment in the one is only three months, in the
 other a year and a day: In the play the merchant’s motive
 for borrowing, (which is finely imagined by *Shakespeare*,
 and is conducive to the general plot,) is not on account of
 his own necessities, but for the service of his friend. To
 these we may add, that the close of the story is finely height-
 ened by *Shakespeare*. A mere copyist, such as we may suppose
 a balladmonger, would not have given himself the trouble to
 alter circumstances: at least he would not have changed them
 so much for the worse. But this matter seems to be placed
 out of all doubt by the first stanza of the ballad, which in-
 forms us that the story was taken from some Italian novel.
 ‘Thus much therefore is certain, (as Mr. *Warton* observes)
 ‘that *Shakespeare* either copied from that Italian novel, or
 ‘from this ballad: Now we have no translation, I presume,
 ‘of such a novel into English; if then it be granted that
 ‘*Shakespeare* generally took his Italian stories from their En-
 ‘glish translations, and that the arguments above, concerning
 ‘the prior antiquity of this ballad are true, it will follow that
 ‘*Shakespeare* copied from this ballad.’

UPON the whole it is very likely that the *Italian* novel,
 upon which this ballad seems founded, took its rise (with an

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inversion

inversion of the circumstances) from the abovementioned story in "The Life of Pope *Sixtus* the Fifth," the memory of which must have been then recent. I should be glad if any of your readers can give any further light into this affair, and, if possible, acquaint the Public, from whence *Shakespeare* borrowed the other part of his fable concerning *Portia* and the *Caskets*; which it is more than probable is drawn from some other novel well known in his time.

I CANNOT conclude without remarking with what art and judgment *Shakespeare* have wove together these different stories of the *Jew*, and the *Caskets*; from both which he has formed one general fable, without having recourse to the stale artifice of eking out a barren subject with impertinent underplots.

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant, &c.

The letter from G. K. will be in our next.